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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH ICRC HEAD OF DELEGATION

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).1. (C)

SUMMARY: ICRC Head of Delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer visited Ambassador on April 1 to discuss ICRC concerns that paramilitary concentration related to demobilization would create security vacuums and increase the risk of FARC and ELN attacks against civilians. Schaerer also confided that ICRC has observed increased nervousness among the FARC, ELN and AUC in the wake of GOC security forces' successes and observed that a larger number of detainees has not caused significant problems in Colombian prisons. While Schaerer lamented that the GOC has been unable to focus its efforts on displacement issues, he agreed that the Colombian situation does not constitute an emergency. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On April 1, Ambassador met with ICRC Head of Delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer to discuss his apprehensions about GOC/paramilitary demobilization negotiations. Schaerer agreed that concentrating demobilized forces is the only way to accurately identify former combatants but expressed concern about a possible increase in forced displacements and violence against civilians by both the FARC and ELN if Colombian security forces prove unable to fill security vacuums left by concentrating forces. Ambassador responded by noting that concentration is the only way to remove ambiguity during negotiations and observed that the capabilities of GOC security forces have improved dramatically over the past year.

13. (C) Schaerer said ICRC has observed nervousness among paramilitaries with whom they had met. Although some have indicated a willingness to disarm and face punishment, the majority worry about the possibility that the peace process might fail, primarily because most paramilitaries do not want to fight Colombian security forces and fear even more the possibility of fighting a two-front war against the GOC and the FARC and ELN. Per Schaerer, the ELN has been weakened by the security forces' presence in all municipalities, which undermines ELN's urban base. Schaerer also noted that high-level FARC commanders, in the wake of the arrests of "Simon Trinidad" and alias "Sonia," are more concerned with their own personal security. Perhaps because senior leaders are reluctant to take security risks, ICRC officials have been meeting with lower ranking FARC commanders.

14. (C) On prisons, ICRC has noted an increase in the number of detainees has not resulted in a corresponding increase in problems related to prisoner treatment. Schaerer confided that a higher number of complaints have been reported against select GAULA units, but cautioned that the problems were not systemic. Per Schaerer, although there has been an increase in the number of paramilitaries detained, the majority have been charged with crimes like extortion or illegal possession of a firearm. Unlike members of the FARC and ELN, Schaerer explained, paramilitaries cannot be charged with rebellion because the GOC has not labeled them "subversive organizations.". Schaerer promised to share with us any information ICRC develops on problem units within the security forces.

15. (C) In response to a question, Schaerer said that although Colombia is in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, he does not believe the overall situation constitutes an emergency. Although the level of violence is high, Colombia's problems cannot be equated with those of countries like Sudan and Liberia. Schaerer lamented that the GOC has not formulated a strategy on displaced persons that integrates the efforts of different government ministries. He also noted that paramilitaries constitute the greatest threat to displaced populations, because paramilitaries have greater resources and a stronger presence in urban areas.

WOOD